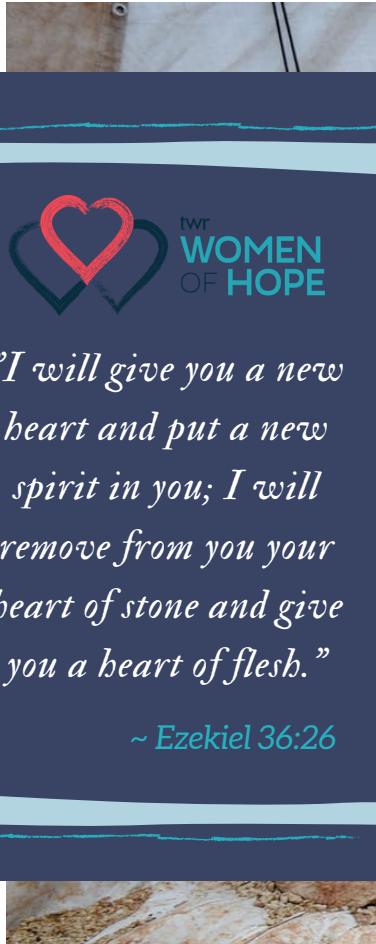


- DEVOTIONAL OF THE MONTH -

# REFUGEES



*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."*

*~ Ezekiel 36:26*



## YOU ARE NEVER WITHOUT A NATION

WRITTEN BY MEGAN DIONNE

Sisters, we have a God who loves us. He has chosen us and called us by name. Our God invites us to be a part of his holy nation, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. This is a key part of the incredible news of the gospel: No matter how far we stray, we can always return to our Father, and he will welcome us with open arms. The Lord has freely offered both himself and his kingdom to us, but he has also given us the responsibility to choose how we are going to respond to him day in and day out. These choices matter.

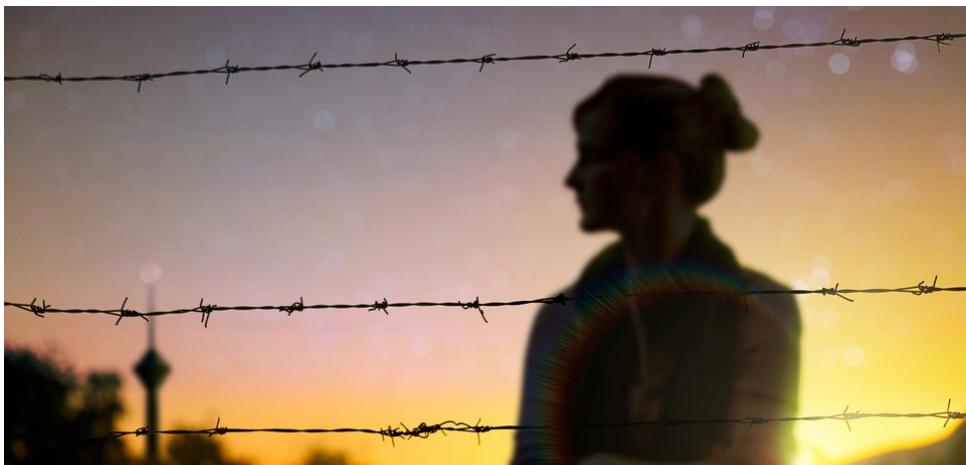
Often we feel that it is easier to celebrate and worship God when our loved ones are happy and healthy. Maybe we feel it is easier to choose God when our jobs are secure, when we have a roof over our heads, spring flowers are blooming and everything is OK. But what happens when everything that is comfortable gets stripped away? What happens when disaster strikes in our lives and we feel utterly and completely alone? How do we choose to respond to God then?

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The Bible is filled with countless stories of individuals who have come face to face with what seems like insurmountable difficulty and sorrow, and in that time, they were forced to make a choice. They could either choose to rely on themselves and face the world on their own, or they could choose to seek the Lord as their refuge and trust him to provide for their every need. One of these stories can be found in the book of Ruth.

The book of Ruth tells the story of three grieving women: Naomi, Ruth and Orpah. Naomi was an Israelite woman who was forced to flee her home in Bethlehem with her husband and two sons when a great famine struck the land. When they finally arrived in the pagan nation of Moab, Naomi's husband died, and she was left alone with her two boys. Both of her sons grew up and married Moabite women who did not know the Lord; their names were Ruth and Orpah. After living in Moab for about 10 years, both of Naomi's sons died, and she was left feeling alone yet again (Ruth 1:1-5).



All three women mourned over the loss of their husbands and sons, but each handled her grief differently. After the three women wept together for a time, Orpah decided to part ways with Naomi and Ruth and return to the familiarity of her pagan gods and the only nation she had ever known. In making this choice, she decided to reject the Lord's offering and distance herself from the one true God.

Naomi chose a different response. We see that in this time of grief she allowed her sorrow to turn into bitterness. She wept and cried out, "The Lord's hand has turned against me!" (Ruth 1:13). Her happiness and security were so wrapped up in the well-being of her family that when it was all stripped away, she began to doubt the validity of God's promises in her life. However, even though Naomi felt discouraged and confused, she still chose to trust in the Lord and lead Ruth back to Bethlehem, a place where she knew the Lord had worked in her life before.

Finally we learn of Ruth's response. Ruth had never followed God or experienced his love and redemption firsthand, but she saw the Lord at work in Naomi's life. Ruth decided to join Naomi on her journey to Bethlehem and chose to trust in the God of Israel. She relied on the Lord to be her ultimate source of hope and chose to believe in his redemptive power. When hard times came and others chose to turn away from God or resent him, Ruth made the choice to trust in the Lord to be her refuge.

Every time I read this story, I am reminded that my response to the Lord matters. No matter what I am experiencing, whether I am struggling, hurt or weeping, I want to keep my eyes focused on Christ and choose him every day. Whether we find ourselves in a difficult season when we feel lost like Orpah, embittered like Naomi or choosing to dive deeper in our faith like Ruth, the Lord's arms are always open for us. He invites us to seek refuge in him and be welcomed into his holy nation.

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*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

1 PETER 2:9

